01263

c. 1964/08/05

Fixed point scheme

TONKIN GULF (deSoto patrols: watch infiltration, nav/hydrographic info, [intell])

2/28-3/10-64 CRAIG conducted patrol w CPA NVN 4 mi, Chi 15, Chi islands 12
2/28 CRAIG intercepted and paced by patrol craft (NVN?)
2/29 CRAIG shadowed by unid. a/c at 26 mi for 2 hours

7/28/64 MADDOX departed Taiwan (for 7/31-8/4; CPAs NVN 8, Chi 15, NVN islands 4)
times local
7/30 0830 MADDOX sighted 4 PT within few minutes. CPA 3 mi
7/31 1300 MADDOX at Pt Alpha (sighted 60-80 junks fishing)
8/1 2000 MADDOX sighted 110 fishing junks; sent "Recd info, possible hostile actic
8/2 1100 MADDOX sighted 75 junks; deviated to avoid passing thru
1230 MADDOX sighted 3 PTs; CPA 7 mi
1315 MADDOX sighted 2 possible Swatows
40 mi of NVN (60 mi S of Haiphong)
1540 MADDOX reported apparent torpedo attack by 2 high-speed craft
1607 MADDOX reported attack by 3 PTs; opened fire with 5 inch (warning first)
1608 MADDOX reported 2 PTs closed to 5000 yds; torpedoes (one each) missed (100-200 yards), MG round hit
1621 MADDOX reported direct hit of one PT (torpedo failed to run)
1630 4 F-8s from TICONDEROGA attacked the 3 PTs; one reported dead in water
1641 MADDOX reported retiring to SE for rendezvous with TURNER JOY at 2000
1800 ± TICON a/c took photos of PTs
8/3 MADDOX with TURNER JOY return to patrol (CPAs NVN 11, Chi 15, NVN islands 4)
2320 MADDOX reported contact at 38.5 mi shadowing him

8/4 1300 MADDOX reported shadow prior to 0100
1400 MADDOX reported suspected shadow 15 mi east; "paralleled for past 4 hours
2040 MADDOX reported "Recd info indicating attack. Proceeding SE at best speed
2136 TICONDEROGA reported MADDOX reported 2 skunks, 3 bogies
2234 TICON reported orig skunks opened to "", 3 new at 13 mi closed to "", evaluated as hostile
2240 MADDOX reported "Commenced firing on closing PTs" (2 on beam 10 mi; 2 40
2252 MADDOX reported "under continuous torpedo attack" south closi
2315 MADDOX: "Avoided 6 torpedoes, attacks continue, TJ may sunk one, 2 remain
0130 attacking vessels broke off engagement

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Authority NLJ 85-169
By OCM, NARA, Date 8-8-89

PROOF 8/2: 1. 3 PTs made daylight runs on MADDOX and fired 3 torpedoes; we have pi
2. Later, additional torpedo launched, but failed to run
3. PTs fired 50 cal. at MADDOX; we have bullet fragments
4. TICONDEROGA pilots confirm PTs in vicinity; took pix

8/4: 1. MADDOX and TJ were shadowed earlier in day (confirmed by ECM contacts of TJ)
2. Radar indicated torpedo runs by contacts
~~3. Torpedo wakes sighted by 4 on TURNER JOY~~
4. Torpedoes heard by sonarmen.
5. Torpedo wake sighted by TJ and MADDOX passing left of TJ at 300 feet
6. Search light seen by all TJ signal bridge personnel (out when a/c ar
7. PT silhouettes seen by 4 on TJ, backed by a/c flares
8. Pilots sighted wakes, dark objects, and experienced AA fire

intell ① Plans ② Nuted lot 2 ③ Enemy warned

SECDEF (before SFRC and SASC 8/6/64): "I want to state at this point that the Department of Defense is fully convinced, in the basis of authoritative informatio available to us, that the attacking craft were operated by military personnel of the North Vietnamese regime and that they were based at several naval bases and ports along the North Vietnamese coast. The information to which I refer also makes clear that the attacks were planned and deliberate and were specifically directed at the United States vessels in a determined effort to destroy them."

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86a

Stempler Friedman Report 1964

NORTH VIETNAM ATTACKS UNITED STATES NAVAL VESSELS IN THE GULF OF TONKIN - AUGUST 2-4, 1964

(Note: Each statement of fact is derived from one or more of the following sources: Quartermaster Log (TAB A) and Combat Information Center Log (TAB B) of the USS MADDOX or the USS TURNER JOY, the relevant entries of which have been transferred onto track charts showing the engagements; interviews ~~and signed statements~~ (TAB C) of MADDOX and TURNER JOY personnel who witnessed the attacks; physical and photographic evidence of the attacks (TAB D); interviews of pilots from the USS TICONDEROGA whose aircraft provided air cover for the two destroyers during the attacks.)

(All times are Saigon times.)

The Gulf of Tonkin is an international body of water bounded on three sides by North Vietnam and Communist China and on the south by the South China Sea. The Gulf is more than 300 miles long and about 175 miles wide at its narrowest part.

During the many years in which North Vietnam has sponsored and directed the Communist insurgency against the Republic of Vietnam, and increasingly in recent years, North Vietnam has used the Gulf of Tonkin as a water route to support the insurgency by infiltrating men and materials from the North into South Vietnam. By means of small naval craft and the countless junks which are always to be found in coastal waters, the supply and reinforcement of the Viet Cong continues. (A major embarkation point, the Dong Moi military training and supply center for the Viet Cong, is less than 50 miles North of the border.)

The United States undertook several years ago to observe and monitor this and other traffic in the Gulf, as well as to obtain navigational and hydrographic information. Intermittent patrols in international waters of the Gulf have been conducted for these purposes by United States destroyers. Such patrols have been conducted at various times since 1962. No such patrol has ever intruded into the territorial waters of North Vietnam or Communist China, as recognized under international law, and no patrol has involved offensive action of any sort by the United States. The Chinese Communists and the North Vietnamese have been fully aware of these patrols and have, in fact, referred to them publicly in the past. Prior to July of this year, neither the Chinese Communists nor the North Vietnamese took any offensive action against the patrols.

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TONKIN

Hanoi to 21°

THE FIRST ATTACK -- Daylight on August 2

At 8:30 A.M. local time on July 30, 1964 the USS MADDOX, located on the 17th parallel some 75 miles from the coast of Vietnam, began what promised to be only one more routine patrol of the Gulf of Tonkin by a United States destroyer. She proceeded west toward Vietnam, and at 1:00 P.M. on July 31 reached a point on the parallel about 12 miles from the coast, a position well within international waters. MADDOX then turned north and proceeded parallel to the coast until the early hours of August 2, when she turned east and headed away from shore for the remainder of the night. The sweep north had been without incident. Only junks and no North Vietnamese naval vessels had been sighted.

start

At daybreak on August 2 (on 19°, 40 mi out) MADDOX again proceeded north on ~~the last leg of~~ her patrol. She arrived at her northernmost point (19°50', 10 mi out) at 11:00 A.M. and then turned southeast, away from the shore and toward the open sea. Another routine patrol had, to all appearances, been completed.

At 12:30 P.M. MADDOX had observed a number of North Vietnamese torpedo boats and gunboats heading toward Hon Me, an island lying to the south at 19°25'. Several of the boats passed within ten miles of the MADDOX. ~~They were traveling at moderate speeds and were not behaving in a hostile fashion. There seemed no occasion for alarm.~~

The situation altered ~~dramatically~~ at 2:57 P.M. At that time the MADDOX radar disclosed that three of the North Vietnamese torpedo boats had left Hon Me and were moving northwest at a high speed and on a course that would intercept the course of the MADDOX. By 3:30 P.M., when the MADDOX was almost 30 miles from shore at 19°50', the PT boats had increased their speed almost to 50 knots and had closed the range to less than 20 miles. The MADDOX altered course to the southeast toward the mouth of the Tonkin Gulf and increased her speed to 25 knots. The ship went to General Quarters, all hands manning their battle stations. Immediate combat air support was requested from the aircraft carrier USS TICONDEROGA, which was then operating outside the Gulf of Tonkin.

The almost 20 knot difference in speed between the torpedo boats and MADDOX made it impossible for the destroyer to avoid an engagement if the smaller craft continued their attack course. By 4:00 P.M. the North Vietnamese boats, still making almost 50 knots, had closed the range to five miles. They were then due west of the MADDOX and had moved into column formation.

~~It became clear to MADDOX that a torpedo attack was imminent. In an [illegible] effort to avoid conflict,~~ MADDOX fired three warning shots ahead of the lead boat. The warning was ignored.

At 4:08 P.M. (Some 40 mi out at 19°40') the second and third boats altered course to the east to commence their torpedo runs. They were then at a distance of less than 9000 yards from MADDOX. As the boats moved in at 50-knot speed, the destroyer took them under fire with her five-inch and three-inch guns. She obtained several hits ~~and undoubtedly interfered with the accuracy of the attack.~~ At a distance of 2700 yards the two torpedo boats launched one torpedo each. As MADDOX turned east to avoid them, the two torpedos passed up her starboard side at a distance of about 200 yards. The torpedo boats, still under effective fire, then moved astern of the MADDOX and passed across her wake.

Immediately thereafter, the lead boat began her own attack, moving in from the northeast at high speed. She received heavy fire from the MADDOX, and MADDOX received fire from automatic weapons of the torpedo boat. The MADDOX then scored a direct hit upon the attacking craft. A torpedo was fired -- or was dislodged by the MADDOX fire -- but it did not run in the water. Under continued fire from the MADDOX, this torpedo boat broke off the engagement. Supporting aircraft from the TICONDEROGA arrived upon the scene and also took the North Vietnamese boats under attack.

By 4:30 P.M. the engagement was over. ~~The scoreboard: one PT boat dead in the water and burning; two others seriously damaged; no damage of consequence to the MADDOX (which was hit only by a single 50-calibre bullet) or to aircraft of the TICONDEROGA.~~ The MADDOX steamed southward further into the Gulf and joined with the USS TURNER JOY, ~~another destroyer that had been steaming toward MADDOX from the mouth of the Gulf.~~

End

~~On Monday, August 3, the President made public instructions that he had issued the day before, after the first attack, regarding future patrols and engagements with enemy craft. He instructed the Navy, first, to continue the patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin; second, to double the force by adding an additional destroyer to the one already on patrol; third, to provide a combat air patrol over the destroyers; and fourth, to issue instructions to the combat aircraft and to the destroyers (a) to attack any force which attacked them in international waters, and (b) to attack with the objective of not only driving off the force but of destroying it. (See TAB E)~~

~~At the same time as these instructions were being broadcast throughout the world, the State Department, acting pursuant to the President's further instructions, took steps to deliver a note of protest to the North Vietnam regime. The note was also widely publicized. It concluded with the words: "The United States Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Viet-Nam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against United States forces." (See TAB F)~~

view 2 photos bullet

THE SECOND ATTACK -- Night of August 4

About 9:00 A.M. local time on the morning of August 3, 18° & 60 mi. out the MADDOX resumed her patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin accompanied by TURNER JOY. ~~The destroyers' mission continued to be same: observation of shipping and navigational tracking. As in the case of all the prior patrols, no offensive action was either planned or undertaken. Because of the North Vietnamese torpedo boat attack on the MADDOX the day before, however,~~ A combat air patrol of aircraft from the carrier TICONDEROGA was maintained overhead.

Re-entering the Gulf of Tonkin, the ships proceeded in a northwesterly direction with the TURNER JOY following 1,000 yards astern of the MADDOX. By mid-afternoon (3:27 P.M.) on August 3, the ships had reached their closest approach to the shores of North Vietnam, a distance of 16 miles at 19° 10'. At that time, they turned to the northeast and proceeded parallel to the coast at 19°30' until the early evening (5:27 P.M.). The MADDOX had detected during this period that it was being observed by a radar operating from the northwest of the sort utilized by North Vietnamese torpedo boats and gunboats.

At 5:27 P.M. at 19°30' the ships turned away from land and proceeded to the southeast toward the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin. The MADDOX reported that a surface contact to the north at a range of some 38 miles had been paralleling her course for the past hour. This contact was also using a radar of the type installed on the North Vietnamese boats. ~~MADDOX therefore had good reason to conclude that a [illegible] was being continued.~~ Several hours later, at 1:00 A.M. on August 4, at 18°50' & 100 mi. out the two ships reversed course and proceeded once again in a northwesterly direction to resume their patrol during daylight.

By early afternoon on August 4 (2:00 P.M.) the destroyers had resumed the patrol at a point in international waters at 19°50' some 25 miles from

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the shores of North Vietnam. At that time the MADDOX reported that yet another radar contact had paralleled her movements during the previous four hours. Until 4:00 P.M. the destroyers steamed southwest parallel to the coast.

At this time, at 19°15' the destroyers began steaming due east in the Gulf toward their night steaming area. That day's patrol was over. ~~Thus far during the two-day period of August 3-4 there had been no incident of any consequence.~~

By 7:40 P.M. on August 4 the destroyers had reached a point on their eastward track more than 65 miles from the coast of North Vietnam and at 18°50', At approximately this time the ships became alerted to a possible attack. They ~~had~~ picked up three high speed contacts closing from the northeast. The MADDOX ~~reported that an attack appeared "imminent" and that she~~ and the TURNER JOY ~~then~~ changed course and proceeded at maximum speed southeast toward the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin.

Shortly thereafter, the destroyers discovered another contact closing from the southeast -- the direction of their new course. Two other contacts were discovered -- to the west and to the northwest. All of these early contacts, however, began to drift astern as both destroyers continued at high speed to the southeast.

Not long thereafter, the ships detected on their radars two unidentified surface vessels and three unidentified aircraft to the northeast. ~~Coupled with the earlier warnings, the presence of these contacts also led to apprehensions of imminent attack. The ships went to general quarters at about 9:00 P.M., all hands manning their battle stations.~~

As they proceeded southeast in the Gulf, the two destroyers picked up at least three additional surface radar contacts in formation to the east. These contacts generally paralleled the courses of the MADDOX and TURNER JOY, and were tracked both on the navigational and the fire control radars at speeds from 20 to above 30 knots. Because of their high speed and relatively small size, the contacts were evaluated as torpedo boats or gunboats. These vessels apparently were lying in wait for the two destroyers with the hope of ambushing them on their original eastward course or as they proceeded southward out of the Gulf of Tonkin.

At 10:40 P.M., at 18°20' & >60 mi out the attacks began. ~~In earnest.~~ In addition to the first contacts to the east, the TURNER JOY detected other surface contacts some 9,000 yards to the east which were closing very rapidly. The MADDOX also picked up one of these contacts immediately and tracked it

as it speeded in toward the destroyers. Shortly thereafter, two new contacts were reported approaching the destroyers from the south and closing at a relative speed of more than 70 miles per hour.

At a range of 6,200 yards, one of the close contacts from the east suddenly turned sharply away from the destroyers -- a maneuver frequently associated with the launching of a torpedo. Almost immediately thereafter, sonar detected torpedo noises on the bearing of the suspected launch point. Both ships immediately maneuvered to evade the torpedo. MADDOX then commenced illuminating fire with her main five-inch battery and TURNER JOY opened destructive fire with her main battery against attacking craft from the east. The torpedo passed parallel to TURNER JOY from aft forward at a distance of about 300 feet. It was visually sighted by at least four members of TURNER JOY's crew. ~~One of whom was the antisubmarine warfare officer.~~ Additional torpedo runs were reported by sonar immediately thereafter.

The next two hours were a period of continued attacks by torpedos and by small calibre automatic weapons; of evasion maneuvers; and of efforts by the destroyers to make their way out of the Gulf of Tonkin while repelling the attacks as best they could under conditions of darkness and poor visibility. ~~Additional torpedos were fired and a number of attacking vessels were tracked by experienced radar personnel on the fire control and search radars of the destroyers.~~ TURNER JOY ~~took at least seven radar contacts under fire and~~ obtained repeated hits that were verified by radar and by visual sightings of black smoke billowing from the attacking craft that were struck. One of the attacking vessels, after being hit by TURNER JOY, disappeared from the radar scope and was presumed sunk. The attacking vessels were observed and identified as torpedo boats by TURNER JOY's crew when the craft were illuminated by flares.

Aircraft providing air cover confirmed many contacts reported by the destroyers. The aircraft also reported anti-aircraft fire from small calibre guns.

Late in the attack, searchlight activity from at least one attacking vessel was observed by bridge personnel of the TURNER JOY.

8/5 ~~Finally, after more than two hours under attack,~~ the destroyers reported at 1:30 A.M. on August 5, that the attacking vessels had broken off the engagement. MADDOX and TURNER JOY then continued out of the Gulf of Tonkin without further incident.

→ skip to RSM A?